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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TURKISH MFA: CYPRUS TALKS ARE "LAST CHANCE"

REF: NICOSIA 703

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. The Turkish MFA's key Cyprus official views the direct talks as the "last chance" for a solution on the island, and notes that "other options" will need to be considered if these negotiations fail. Both Turkish Cypriot leader Talat and Ankara suspect the Greek Cypriot side plans to move slowly, in the mistaken belief that G/C leverage will increase as Ankara faces EU deadlines. The Turkish Government will press UNSYG Special Representative Downer on the pace of the talks when Downer visits Ankara September 10. Ankara views the Turkish Guarantee and a Turkish military presence as non-negotiable, points recently reiterated by the new Chief of the Turkish Armed Forces. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) In a September 3 meeting with PolCouns and DepPolCouns, MFA Deputy Director General for Cyprus Kerim Uras appeared relatively upbeat about the direct Cyprus negotiations being launched the same day. However, he noted that he sees the talks as the "last chance" for a Cyprus solution. Patience has worn thin in Turkey. If these talks fail, then "other options" need to be considered. Uras dismissed press accounts that the Russian Ambassador in Ankara had suggested Moscow could recognize the "TRNC" in return for Turkey's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. He had no direct confirmation of this alleged statement. It was premature to discuss "TRNC" recognition when the talks were just beginning. These discussions should be given a chance.

¶3. (C) Uras said his main concern is the pace of the discussions. Ankara and T/C leader Talat worry that ROC President Christofias plans to drag out the negotiations until late 2009, hoping to exploit EU pressure on Turkey. The Greek Cypriots need to realize that Ankara's stance on key issues such as the Turkish Guarantee will not be affected by the looming deadline of the Ankara Protocol. Talat is impatient to move quickly to a conclusion. He views it as disturbing that Christofias is only willing to meet once a week; Talat would prefer twice weekly meetings. Ankara will host UNSYG envoy Downer on September 10, and will urge him to move the talks along. Downer should be able to assess Greek Cypriot bona fides by whether they move quickly. Uras said he also finds it worrisome that some of the Greek Cypriots in the working groups still feel free to overlook elements already agreed by Talat and Christofias, such as the basic formulation of two "Constituent States" which would make up a new federal Cyprus.

¶4. (C) Uras noted that Ankara will press Downer on establishing a deadlock breaking mechanism for the inevitable disagreements on key issues, such as property. He said Ankara's position parallels that of the Israelis: given the

passage of time, the return of refugees should be minimal; compensation and property exchanges should be the rule. Uras joked that a Cyprus Solution is "like a Rubic's cube": if you know what you are doing, you can solve it quickly; otherwise, you will waste a lot of your time.

15. (C) Recent polls on the island show a majority of Turkish Cypriots advocate a two-state solution, according to Uras. Still, he was confident this could be reversed if Ankara weighed in to advocate a "yes" vote on a new federal solution. The Turkish Cypriot and Turkish publics will need assurances that the basic framework of the Annan Plan has not been diluted. The Turkish Guarantee is a must. A Turkish military presence is also vital, although Uras conceded that the numbers could be drastically reduced. Uras waved away our suggestions that hardline critics in Ankara could prove influential. He said his e-mail in-box is clogged with complaints of critics such as former Foreign Minister Mumtuz Soysal (also Uras's former law professor). "It's the same old shit," he said -- and much of it is markedly uninformed.

16. (C) Uras agreed that the Greek Cypriot community needs to see any proposed solution as a "new and improved" Annan Plan, but that those elements already are apparent. Innovative ideas on property and judicial review have been put forward by the Turkish Cypriots. The Greek Cypriots have numerous examples that the Turkish Cypriots are "serious" about seeking an agreement. Uras said the Greek Cypriots should bring a broader perspective to the negotiating table, and not dwell on minutia such as the numbers of returnees to a single area. A solution would give Cyprus access to the huge Turkish economy, and bring them into an emerging new regional

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equation that includes a prosperous Iraq. At the same time, Uras noted, Turkey needs reassurances that its access to the Cypriot economy will be on the same footing as EU member states. He predicted that this may become a stumbling point in the talks.

17. (C) Uras said Turkish Cypriot leader Talat's recent discussions in Ankara had gone well. Talat is a "smart guy" who has a firm grasp of the negotiating details and appreciates the "technical assistance" provided by Ankara on issues where T/C expertise is lacking. Uras said it was significant that Talat had a front-and-center seat at the recent change of command speech delivered by Chief of the Armed Forces General Basbug, whose remarks reiterated that the Turkish guarantee is essentially nonnegotiable.

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